

Spiritual Formation, Romance, and Discipline: The Spiritual Discipline of Emotional Chastity Q&A

By John Coe

John Coe:

You take this seriously, Lord. I can only thank You that we are, in Christ, fully forgiven, fully accepted, for all of our failures. So we come to You. You might just take a moment right now in silence of your heart and just ask the Lord, "God, what is the state of my, of my heart in this? Am I possessing myself in holiness when it comes to my sexuality and my desire for another?" Just ask the Lord what's-what's the truth of what's going on in my life right now? He knows all anyways. You might ask God, "Give me wisdom. God, give me wisdom. Open my heart in love." Father, do bless these students. There are so many lives here who have come to give themselves to You and to the training of their souls, their body, and spirit in wisdom, knowledge, and holiness. God, watch over them just as You watched over me when I was here. In my folly, but in my desire to grow. Watch over us in Jesus' name, amen.

[Audience applauds]

Announcer:

We have about 17 minutes that we've set aside for Q&A, that's probably about five or six questions. So there are microphones here and here. Also, John will be at the collegium today, air conditioned, at 3:30 for questions. But if you have questions, won't you make your way to the microphone? And let's just jump right in. We got someone right over here.

John Coe:

Hey!

Announcer:

Try to keep it quiet so we can hear these. Oh, and also just a reminder, this is not a time, um, this is a time to ask brief questions, perhaps about time to preach. How about it?

Audience member 1:

Thank you very much for your, thank you very much for your work, I appreciate it. I am curious, though, being married at 19, like you said, do you feel you are adequately prepared to be married, given your criteria that you're prepared?

John Coe:

Oh, absolutely not. Greta and I, we have explored this so much together and in our own life, you know, teaching at Rosemead and Talbot, you know, experiencing therapy. No, as Greta and I look back on it, we say, "Oh, God, we were so unwise." And yet we also see there's-there's many dynamics. We weren't raised in a Christian home, neither of us. And when we came to the Lord, she actually led me to the Lord. The Lord used us. And this is not the way it should be. But no doubt the Lord use Greta and I almost to repair one another. Well, any time you have two children trying to repair one another, whoa, gets a little rocky. And it was. And so I would-I would never encourage that. However, in God's sovereignty, we married at 19, and it has been the journey of a lifetime. It has-the Lord has used that so much. He's used Gretta in my life and I in her life so deeply and profoundly, because once history happens, and we don't know all the all the causes and reasons because, you know, we're we're in the mix of our virtues and vices where we are.

Once history happen, now the issue was, I mean, I remember--I'll just say the story. When I- when I was about to get married at 19, I told her dad, "I want to--I'd like to marry your daughter." And I remember her dad like, well, you know, like six feet four, smoking his pipe, is a brilliant man. "Johnny, I think you need to sit down, okay?" And he said, "Johnny, let me tell you about the land mines of life." Whoa. And he sat back, and for an hour he told me about 10 land mines. And I'm sure I stepped on every one of them. But all I could think about the whole conversation was, "But dad, I love her." That's that's it. And so wisdom wasn't driving. I was twitterpated, I--because I met a person who knew me more deeply than anybody else. And so, again, I had a wise counselor take me on a different track, we could have waited a while. But again, the Lord has used that. And I remember after getting married at 19, this was probably three weeks into marriage, I was sitting--I was going to a junior college right before I came to Biola, I was sitting on the steps and I, I just sat there, "Oh, God, what have I done, I have married and I'm 19 and I don't know what I'm doing." It just overwhelmed me. But, you know, God just used all of this. So here Proverbs doesn't say, "Oh, just take a shot at it." Proverbs says, "No. Wisdom." But here we're in the mix, doing the best we can. Yeah, and so God is going to use absolutely everything. Yeah, go.

Audience member 2:

Hello, could you expound upon the difference between face to face and side by side?

John Coe:

Yeah, you know, this is the real--this is, this issue of boundaries, we're talking about boundaries to the soul. And what does this mean? You know, as I think of side to side, this is what C.S. Lewis talked about, is friendship. And so I'm all for cross-gender friendships and enjoying. But-but there the issue is how to experience ourselves also with one another. And so, as I think of the side to side, you know what the side to side welcomes? More. He always wants more. "Yeah, come on in. Oh, come on. You want to be part of the movement. Yeah." So side to side always wants the movement to get big, it's good. And so, were face to face is I just want you. And so it's kind of an existential thing where, you know, one has to just be honest in their own heart. I don't want others now, I want this because this feels so good. See, when you're--when you're wanting to pair off, you know what's really happening? It's your deepest desire for union is being actuated. Whoa. Well, Greta was the first person--I mean, I'd had other kinds of things. Well, here's the deal. And so that's where you--the navigating will be. Wow. Because it's going to happen. You're going to be side to side and you're going to, "Whoa, mmm. Did you--oh, this is good!" And now, I don't mind tasting it, I mean, here's the issue. When that starts happening in your life, really, that's when you need to really enter deeply into prayer and probably wisdom with others to really think through what's going on. Is this the time to do it? Because once you start giving yourself to it, it's really hard to pull out.

I know of situation after situation after situation at Biola where individuals got caught early, freshman, sophomore, and it was moving so fast and once they beginning to realize, "Oh my gosh, what are we doing? I want to go on and get a PhD, and I'm just a junior." And once you've tasted so much and then to pull out, the hurt, the pain, and the lack of practicing wisdom in the first place, it's almost like practicing unfaithfulness. So here I'm digging deep, enjoying, welp,

now pull out. Digging deep, whoop, pull out. Well, you bring that into marriage. And many guys do, as soon as you hit contact with your wife's bad. And it's going to happen, guys. You're going to want to pull out. So this is a tender, delicate thing of real wisdom, I think, to follow. Yeah, cool.

Audience member 3:

I-um, at what point does a proper emotional connection with the person overstep its bounds to becoming emotionally unchaste? Could you give some examples of, like, words or actions or how?

John Coe:

Well, again, I'm concerned--well, we could start with touch. I am concerned about touching, fondling, kissing. This is, we're moving now. But let's move a more emotionally. This is where it's more difficult of--and I just want to ask guys, well, first I'll talk with the women. For women, you just need to really ponder yourself as a resource. So there's a part of me in there deep, that I really want to give only to the person I marry. If I marry, I want them to relish that and-and here you're going to have to now navigate. And there's, now I don't think there's any hardcore rule for this, but to begin to think through, "Lord, give me wisdom of how much time to share and not share. That guy's just asking me questions. Oh, this feels really good. We're sitting here. No, I'm not going to do it. I'm going to share this, but I'm not going to share all that. I'm going to keep this here." So, if you find as a woman, "No, I just want to share all." Whoa, let's just, yeah. Let's eat one another now.

Now we got a problem, you want to eat now? Can be tough, someone's going to get really hurt, or you're bringing stuff into marriage. It's going to be a little problematic, or you're going to be getting married too early. So, again, he-here's these issues for guys, I just want to say, guys, be really thinking of, not 'how much can I experience of her,' but 'how can I help her fine boundaries? How can I help her kind of be over there rather than me tasting all?' So again, this is a kind of an existential, honest question with your own soul in relation to God. And you might just ask God, "We're right here. What do I really want here? Do I really want to protect her, guard her? Because I may not marry her and I want to guard her so that she can really experience that with someone else. Or do I just want to taste her deeply?" And so, guys, I want you to just back off from those searching glances from trying to--guys, I know you can do this. You can awaken the hunger in a woman. By just looking at her a certain way, talking to her in a certain way, and that's what we want to watch out for, and again, this is an issue of the heart. And so this is going to take us to have some consideration and thought about this issue. Yeah.

Audience member 4:

Um, okay, I was just wondering, because you said that you shouldn't date or pair off until you're ready to marry and the other person's ready to marry. So I was just wondering, is there a point at which it's too early to talk about marriage in a relationship? Is it unhealthy or?

John Coe: Yeah. This is, you know, this would get into a lot of issues here, you know. Wow, how do I know that one? Because, you know, you know, there's-there's all kinds of books out now on how to do, you know, what ways to do this stuff. Um. I'm concerned. About making the relationship explicit. Unless it becomes so kind of obvious to one another, like, look, our life--

like, you know, I'll say this, you know, with people that I work with who are in their 30s and 40s, well, their lifestyle has made them ready. They've been looking. Something's happening, okay, everything's going when we're here at this stage. And by the way, there's so many fish that still need to be cooked. And so this is difficult. I--and so I would say here's--here's where wisdom needs to be, I would first take that conversation to somebody else. That's what I would do. I'd first go to a spiritual adviser or a therapist, a big brother or sister, someone wiser than myself. My parents. If you're really, really close, I might even go to their parents.

And so you're not married yet, so you don't owe one another anything. Kind of, you're wanting to explore. And so in the side to side, kind of being with one another in the mix, and I really look back at prior centuries, we had so many more opportunities for cross gender experiences. Now we don't. You're on your own kind of, you know. We don't--we don't do anything, I mean, by what--we don't, I--wouldn't it be great if--we probably should re--I would love, you know, *Pride and Prejudice*. I wish we had, you know, 17th century, 18th century dancing here, you know?

[Audience laughs and applauds]

John Coe:

I mean, wouldn't that be cool? Yeah. You know, let's learn that stuff. Not, you know, not I mean, not the stuff I did in the 70s, you know, the wriggling, you know.

[Audience laughs]

John Coe:

And I mean, I probably was a little little tweak, but. But we need more contact. And fun contact, where I think most of our contact is private, seeking out one another. So, so, again, I'm-one's going to have to be very wise. I encourage people not to make their relationship explicit for some time. Don't talk about it. Let a little of the mystery go on. But I really think the issue is for everyone to get clear on "where am I in life? Am I really ready? Is this wise or not?" That's the issue. Yeah. So maybe there's more in your mind, but.

Audience member 5:

Hi.

John Coe:

Hi.

Audience member:

Um, I was wondering if you, or someone, or if you know someone that has like the Peter Pan or the Cinderella syndrome, is there a way to get them like, as a close friend or something, is like, is there a way to get them to recognize that? And is there a way to help yourself or someone else to change that kind of perception in them? Like if they recognize that and instead fill it with God, or fill it with that relationship with, that you can get in that way.

John Coe:

Wow. Well, my first thought is kind of in-in romance relations. If you're in something, your task is not to uh, to help them grow. Yeah. So it's-it-but if you know others, I think it's something to

begin to dialogue about. And-and again, the Cinderella, all it is, it's this deep hunger and desire to be known that moves ahead of self-respect. And being able to contain oneself and wait for the one who's really ready, and so I want to begin to explore with that person what's really going on in their heart. That's where we're all going. We're all-it's all going to the heart. So with this kind of person, I want to explore what's really taking place in that relationship. Is it moving fast? Is there a deep hunger in you? Is there a need to kind of pull back in and deal with that hunger? Rather than ravage another person? Or for the Peter Pan, now I know this one very well because that was clearly me getting married, as I wanted Greta on my terms.

Now, the problem with Peter Pan's and Cinderella's is they don't hear much except their own needs. And that's what we hear, and we're all selfish, so we hear our needs for a Peter Pan. It would have been wonderful had a wiser old person or someone had come by and just said, you know, "John, now that you're a believer, you really care about this. Are you really ready to take care of Greta? Are you really ready for responsibility?" Someone that I would have trusted, who would have begun to really explore my heart. Now, I bless my parents and her parents, but they weren't able to do that, they were more able just to say, "John, this is wrong. Something's not right here." So we're going to need someone to take somebody on a journey internally about this. So I'm going to--for you, I would try to steer them to begin to explore their heart with somebody else. Yeah. Last question. Sorry.

Audience member 6:

Cool beans. Uh, hey so--

John Coe:

Hey.

Audience member 6:

So, uh.

John Coe:

Yeah, a guy!

Audience member 6:

Alright, we're doing it!

John Coe:

Alright.

[John Coe laughs]

Audience member 6:

So you just mentioned the hunger that we tend to experience in our souls. And I'm wondering, practical suggestions for if we do abstain and we choose to be emotionally chaste, we still have a hole inside of us. And how do we go about working on that, especially when we reach out to God in our loneliness? And oftentimes we find that not being satisfied, per say. So what was your um, practical recommendation?

John Coe:

Yes, this is, and this is going to be true of all of us. And it'll be true even if we date, marry, you know, whatever. Doesn't matter. The hole is still going to be there. I, I would encourage, and it's a good thing you said it, even as we go in prayer, because ultimately prayer in relation to God, He is the one who is going to meet this need, however, especially developmentally where we're at. One may not experience that, in fact, you may come to prayer and this is cool, go to prayer, go to retreat, open, honest to God, begin to take this discussion. And, you know, you might discover is, wow, this hunger is huge. It's mammoth. And now here's where I know I'm on a project and the project is God. There is something going on in my heart. This is like a wound. This is a hunger. "God, begin to give me wisdom of what this journey would be."

And I would just say at Biola, I clearly would want you to get involved in either therapy or spiritual direction, someone who's wiser than you. This is what it's going to be needed, someone who's wiser than you to take you, or a woman, whatever, on a journey into the depths of the heart to see what's really driving that to be known at that place so that that is a place now you can begin to pray on it. I would also probably begin, like even in the dorms with RA's, RD's, to begin discussions about this, to-to really take this and think about it clearly. But here, I really am going to say this is where you're going to need a soul journey partner to take you down. Kind of like the SWAT team, take them down. This isn't going to be a gentle walk with Jesus. He's going to take you down. He's going to take you--I'll just tell you, He's going to take you into deep places of weakness and need. And it's great to have another person there who's a soul doctor that can help articulate the heart because that's preparing the heart for prayer. But to do it on our own. For many, that's going to be very difficult, just in prayer. Yeah.

Audience member 6:

Cheers.

Announcer:

Let's thank John again.

[Audience applauds]

Announcer:

Okay, a couple of things before you go, remember, there is a book table out there with some of Becky's books. Also, by the way, on the back of your Torrey program, if you have that, there is a list of resources. John was talking about spiritual direction. He was talking about counseling. We have a Biola Counseling center. Last night, Mike Haley was talking on Exodus Ministries in the back. We have some resources that may be very helpful to you. So be aware of that. I suggest as you go out that you talk to one another just as you're out there. Just ask each other what made sense to you this morning? What really struck you? If you just need some conversation out there, I would do that. We'll see you back here at 11 o'clock. You'll hear the worship band, come back here and hear Becky Tirabassi, thanks.